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The measure of the ultimate

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Two contrasting motives are at work in the philosophy of Ernst Bloch. One is the intention to dispel illusions and ideologies that chain and oppress humanity – a motive for which Bloch returns again and again to the great epochs of enlightenment in the history of thought, the other is the intention to show the anticipatory, transcending dimension in consciousness and reality, which gives depth, meaning and direction but which is not open to the clear, rational analysis that is at our disposal in the critique of ideology. For Bloch, these two motivations require and reinforce each other and form two aspects of the same thing: philosophical truth. I think it is the double-faced nature of his thinking that is most characteristic, and also that which makes his philosophy most significant today. We need the penetrating analysis of reason just as much, and in the same movement, as the sensitivity to articulate transcendence, without which there can be no truth or at least no philosophy. The critique of ideology can only be executed in showing how ideology uses and distorts the transcendent orientation in human life, and the articulation of transcendence needs reason to keep itself from precisely those distortions and reifications.

In *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* Bloch develops an argument which shows that we cannot do without a category of a transcendent absolute in philosophy. The basic ontological constellation is that of the processual relation between Front, Novum and Ultimum. An event, if it is a real event, is at the front of process, it is new and it articulates in a way that needs to be understood very precisely, the ultimate. Being as event cannot be understood simply as nextness, because nextness is the abstraction of process – it is empty and lacks concreteness. The event as something new or unexpected, or the arrival of something or someone that is really new, cannot reside in a mere repetition of a new moment, a mere ‘once more’ or a mere ‘next’ – that type of event decays into the rigid identity of the same, the entirely predictable. For the event to be a true event and hence unpredictable, to be new, it must incorporate a form of repetition, but in a different way from the abstract repetitiveness of the merely next. It requires the changed repetition, in the new event, of the as yet unrealised totality of striving, which seeks to be attempted or realised in the succession of events. We need the reference to a category of the ultimate, of identity in other words, to be able to understand the strong version of the new, which is the unexpected arrival of another or of the new. The category of ‘front’ as the mediation between the new and the ultimate is meant to capture this moment of the event. Historicity becomes dialectical and ceases to be mere succession. The event can only then be completely unexpected if it is another step on the way to identity.

The importance of this analysis can hardly be overestimated. It shows that identity (as the ‘last, highest and most thorough repetition’ (5: 233)¹) and radical alterity are heterogeneously as well as internally related: they require each other and yet are strictly irreducible to each other. That paradox can be cited as the most basic expression of the fundamental ontology in Bloch’s philosophy. While the alterity of the encounter is, in last instance, the closing moment of history (in other words: history exists only as its ending), it can only be thought of as such, not as an ultimate in itself: if it was, it would not be a real encounter. Thus, in order to rescue the irreducible nature of the event as the unexpected arrival of the other (Levinas, Derrida) we have to affirm the totality of identity as well. Alterity is the anagnorisis in identity: unverhofftes Wiedersehen, in Hebel’s words. Its occurrence is its end: it is the flash, the rupture, of relatedness – it cannot be thought of as a state or as static; many recent attempts to develop a philosophy of alterity can be seen, from this point of view, to be themselves under the spell of a reification of alterity. This is a good example of how we need a strong notion of identity precisely if we are to keep premature fixations of identity at bay.

However, the relation between alterity and identity, between novum and ultimum, is that of what Bloch calls ‘extraterritoriality’. We experience extraterritoriality in human life as the difference between what is realised in historical process and its core or aim, which has not found its way into the expressive process yet. The core of existence is protected against death, Bloch writes, because it is not yet alive. If it was, or once it is, and has succeeded it will really be extraterritorial to death because death itself belongs to the sphere of the inadequate, the less than final (13: 373). One consequence of this is that the anticipations of the ultimate, of identity, are not experienced in historical process as such, but in the halting of movement, in the symbolic intentions of rare experiences of anticipated rest, arrival, holding still (5: 337).

A mode of philosophising that tries to find out and articulate that in experience and reality which points above itself, which is more than what it has yet become, cannot start from even as much as the attempt to formulate an unshakeable foundation on which to erect a system or a set of valid arguments. The language of this type of thinking is hermeneutical, interpretative, tracing – it is discursive and conceptual but seeks the point at which connections and relationships emerge or become evident, rather than that it tries to provide necessary and sufficient conditions to support certain conclusions. Its starting points, for there are several, is neither phenomenological, nor positivist or logicist, although it can be critical. Perhaps we can say that Bloch’s philosophy is a speculative critique. The basic relation in thought for Bloch is that between the intensive ‘that’ of existence, and the categorial ‘what’. The gap between the two is the locus in which reality as process occurs, which can therefore be said to be the process of the realisation of categories that are

¹ All references to Bloch’s works are to the Gesamtausgabe, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag 1959 and later. References are between brackets and give the volume, followed by a colon and the page numbers referred to. So (5: 233) means *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5, p. 233.

adequate to that which is latent in intensive existence. Philosophy itself is one facet of this process of realisation – it is one of the trajectories along which humanity realises itself: “Daß aber zwischen Daß und Was überhaupt bezogen werden kann: diese Beziehung ist selber die Grundkategorie, und alle anderen führen sie nur aus, alle anderen sind nur die fortgeführte Lichtung der aus dem Daß entspringenden Was-Vielheit durch ein Wegnetz”. (15: 71) The affirmation of the existence of a relation, no matter how broken, tentative, promissory, forefelt and dark, between ‘that’ and ‘what’, for which no argument or reason can itself be given, amounts to the affirmation of a processual conception of reason for which unity and difference are not irreconcilable. It amounts to the idea that reason is not entirely alien to brute existence. But that is exactly what has been the hope of philosophy since its beginnings, a hope that Hegel reaffirmed over against Kant, and that was subsequently placed under attack from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to the postmodern thinkers. It is the point where Bloch consciously latches onto classical philosophy, and where Bloch sides with Erich Fromm when he writes that ‘reason cannot be effective unless man has hope and belief’. The estrangement which reading Bloch today can easily trigger has more to do with this basic feature of his philosophy than with Bloch’s allegiance to outdated modes of political economics. Moreover, precisely because we have to do here with a dimension of philosophy that is hardly open to argumentative deliberation; it seems that Whitehead’s remark, that philosophical positions are never refuted but are simply abandoned, is to the point here. Bloch’s position has been abandoned broadly since the end of his life. Maybe, however, positions can also be taken up again. The practical benefit that a philosophical language which is as lyrical as it is reasonable may well have a decisive role to play if this were to happen. The philosophical point that pluriformity and otherness require identity, not to keep other and same together in an overarching, already given stability, but precisely for otherness or pluriformity to be radically other and radically many, may also become convincing once more. The currently much discussed view of Alain Badiou, who appears in its outward form and statements to constitute a return to philosophy in a more classical conception and according to which the many and the one are completely unrelated, issues in an arbitrary activism of the one and a removal of the many from philosophy, and of philosophy from the process of truth finding. However this may be, it is important here to emphasise the fact that a critical and free engagement with Bloch’s philosophy has to acknowledge the fundamental assumption of the relation between ‘that’ and ‘what’ if it is not to fall back into speechlessness. Curiously, the assumption of the dynamic relation between ‘that’ and ‘what’, which is the assumption that there is a meaning in things, leads to an attitude that it is far less fetishising about language than much philosophy which cannot subscribe to that assumption. Language itself is subjected to the gap like everything else, and therefore words have to be taken in their context and as attempting to say something – but saying is not stating or picturing or labelling. Language is not primarily a system of signs, a verbal magnitude, but a mode of expression – as such it articulates something that transcends it, and that is where its nature as a living medium is located. That which transcends language cannot be directly put into words, it is there only in language as

expressive act – in the act of saying. The philosopher has to speak, has to enact his thoughts as a dramatist does. Benjamin writes in his essay on the *Wahlverwandtschaften*: "Das Mysterium ist im Dramatischen dasjenige Moment, in dem dieses aus dem Bereiche der ihm eigene Sprache in einen höheren und ihr nicht erreichbaren hineinragt. Es kann daher niemals in Worten, sondern einzig und allein in der Darstellung zum Ausdruck kommen, es ist das ‚Dramatische‘ im strengsten Verstande."² Bloch's style, which is eminently dramatic and is a form of lending speech to transcendence as hope – a form of practice, when it is successful a form of happiness itself³, can be understood against this background as adequate to what it tries to do. In it we learn that happiness, when it is most there, is least of all finished and at its end, that contentment or satisfaction and desire do not exclude each other but that the more there is of one, the more there can be of the other: satisfaction ceases to be the negation of desire; a quality, related to happiness, that we can perhaps refer to with words like 'awe' or 'adoration' arises.⁴ It is this quality of these texts, which lies like a glimmer over them where they are at their best, that provides their measure of truth.

I believe there can be no philosophy if it is not in one way or another given in by what remains inexpressible and which constitutes the heart of existence. It is both that which is the utopian surplus in everything that can be expressed and the dark, hidden, face of being; in Bloch's philosophy it resurfaces as the unity of end and beginning. Philosophers are like painters or musicians, who paint or play until that inexpressible core becomes visible or audible as invisible and mute, and illuminates both the origin and the destiny – the identity – of the work. It is what gives philosophical prose its specific quality, that in which it is more than science but also more committed to discursiveness than mysticism. Its basis, that which makes it possible, appears to be in its minimal form the decision or wager to think as if there is a relation to be made between 'that' and 'what'. In a slightly more emphatic sense, that decision is made in faith or hope and constitutes faith or hope, or that of faith and hope which remains after the acid of critique has done its work, and without which that acid cannot do its work.

What does this mean for Bloch's philosophical anthropology? In human existence, life is given to itself: I have to live my life. The way in which I am given to myself, however, is shrouded in darkness. Each moment of my existence is unknown to me in its nearness – which means that I am unknown to myself, or I am a question for myself which is so fundamental that no possible answer can even be contemplated: the absolute question is an inconstructable question, it is what philosophers have called wonder, but a wonder that Bloch takes out of its contemplative sphere and takes in an almost existential sense as indicating the openness and desire that co-constitute the human condition. As I realise myself in subject-object relations, an identity between me and my world is attempted and

² Walter Benjamin, *Illuminationen*. *Ausgewählte Schriften* 1, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1977, p. 135.

³ Adorno said this about Benjamin's prose.

⁴ There is an echo here of the Aristotelian understanding of happiness as the full-fledged virtuous exercise of the potentialities of one's nature, but it is complemented by a striving and a creativity, an 'Überschreiten' which is not alien to happiness.

may succeed from time to time and to a certain extent (for example when I find love, or succeed in writing a text or producing something, or in another territorium of human realisation), but the 'darkness of the lived moment' remains, and with it remains the extraterritorial core that is not mediated in the historical process. As long as there is a historical process there is the darkness of the lived moment, and no amount of historical development or progress can make it enter into history. It is important to understand this in its full implications, for otherwise we can easily misread Bloch and think that he held that historical development itself will lead to the full realisation of what is ultimate. That is not the case – the fact of history itself simply is the darkness of the lived moment, and the hope for and premonition of the ultimate motivates history, but does not complete it. History is limited by death, but death points towards the extraterritorial that is not part of history. As history is motivated by hope, so is our relation to the extraterritorial, but these are two forms of hope. Human existence on one hand moves within the sphere of historical hope, without which the hope that death is not the final anti-utopia cannot be maintained, but the end of history is, as it were, the fulfilment of all of history at the same time, not the final resolution at the end of a temporal process. The historical development towards a humane, social world is itself one of the real events in history that seeks its fulfilment alongside others, in nature and culture. But of that socialist process Bloch said that when its economic goals will have been achieved, we will understand how little has been achieved. It cannot be denied that Bloch does sometimes speak as if the ultimate is what realises itself in the historical process, but if we take it precisely we should always say more than that. Historical reality creates its own fulfilment rather than that it moves towards a goal or state that is already given. It is dynamic because it carries within itself the premonition of its fulfilment, but its fulfilment is not a simple resultant of the historical process itself. Something else is needed, to which we can maintain no other relationship than that of hope; it is what is tendentially and latently possible in history: "Das höchste Gut ist selber dieses noch nicht gebildete, in der Tendenz des Prozesses letzthin bedeutete, in der Latenz des Prozesses letzthin realmögliche Ziel." (5: 1566) There is no other way to it than through history (because it is not yet), through the process of externalising the internal and internalising the external, but it becomes part of our intentions and orientations in hope, which is precisely the paradoxical combination between teleological action and the awareness that not all is in our hands. Hope is no guarantee and in that sense 'process' as teleological does not have the quality of an effectively causal process. The relation between a goal and the process that leads towards it is more akin to the relation of manifestation between the will as thing in itself and its objectifications in Schopenhauer than to the causal determinism we find in science. The goal manifests itself as the new:

Auch in dieser Rückbeziehung auf den Kern und Anfang ist Vorwegnahme das Organon jedes überhaupt nur – aussichtsreichen Entsinnens. Wenn überhaupt ein Blick hier geraten kann, so ist Vorwegnahme der primäre, der in die Nähe des vor-zeitlichen, das ist: des in jedem Augenblick treibend-versteckten, noch

überall außer-zeitlichen, in den Prozeß uneingegangenen Daß-, Wurzel-, Grund-Faktors geraten läßt. Sich des Anfangs der Zeiten zu entsinnen: auch diese selber uralte und wirklich tiefste Grübelfrage der Erinnerung ist so keine der Erinnerung, sondern der Hoffnung. Denn eben das Weswegen ist in allem Geschehen das noch unmanifestierte, unidentifizierte Wozu; Alpha kommt, statt durch Wiedererinnerung, erst durch Treue zum Ziel als Novum hervor. (13: 284; my emphasis)

Vorwegnahme, anticipation, is that which lets us get in the vicinity of that which is not part of process (history) itself; the categorial, which Bloch here deliberately describes as organon, is the articulation of that Vorwegnahme. In what is truly new, an anticipation of the 'that-factor' emerges. The ontological relation between history and its fulfilment itself is hope, it is itself the fact that there is a relation between 'that' and 'what'. It seems to me that this is an exceedingly subtle point, which must be kept clearly in mind if we are not to read Bloch as expounding a simple historical progressivism, a transformation to the realm of historical development of a theistic creationism – the form of utopian thinking we have come to treat with such suspicion. It is easy to say, even if only looking at the passage quoted here, that Bloch appears to contradict himself: the 'that-factor' is as yet outside of all process, and yet it is in process that it emerges as the anticipated new. The ambiguity of this statement can then be found back in most statements Bloch makes about the relation between historical development and the utopian.⁵ While it is an open question whether or not Bloch sometimes has fallen victim to the flattened view of that relation that this ambiguity may trigger, I do think it is at least possible not to fall victim to it, if we emphasise the point that Bloch's philosophical innovation is to assign to 'hope' and ontological function and meaning, as the name for the relation between existence and essence⁶: history itself becomes eventual, and becomes a hope or anticipation – time, whether seen as temporality or as a Newtonian container for events is not the prerequisite for anticipation; rather it is the other way around. 'Future' has to be understood on the basis of 'not yet', not the other way around. In this sense, it even becomes possible to understand that time and space for Bloch are themselves categories of realisation – in an almost transcendental manner again – between 'that' and 'what', and in their utopian form become what he calls 'realm' (Reich) or 'home' (Heimat) and 'exodus'.⁷

⁵ Much of Hans Jonas' criticism of Bloch is based on this liability to distortion of the Blochian ontology. See *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1979.

⁶ Bloch uses this term (or its Germanic cognate *Wesen*) occasionally, but also suggest the term 'subsistence' to indicate the not-yet. "(E)s fehlt für diese eigentümliche Beschaffenheit sogar der entschiedene logisch-ontologische Name. Wird er gesucht, so bietet sich philosophie-geschichtlich höchstens der Terminus des Wesenden an (falls er neu, nämlich nicht nur im Grund, sondern aus ihm heraus im Ziel gedacht wird)". (13: 294)

⁷ Bloch's ideas of a 'riemannian' elastic time and of 'future in the past' fit with this view of time and space as, to use a classical term, phenomena bene fundata in re, but not ontologically fundamental or irreducible. Again we see a standpoint that is not far off from well-known positions in classical metaphysics. Bloch's philosophy, at all points, speaks directly to the philosophical tradition in a way

Again, the relation of manifestation, which is a relation of expression, because of its particular ontological nature, has its effect on the mode of writing that sets out to articulate it. If that relation is not causal, its articulation in philosophy cannot use the category of causality to express it (rather, that category must itself be understood as part of the organon of anticipation, so that even in all natural causal relationships we can see an anticipation of the ontological not-yet). In a way, Bloch could be said to be thinking the thing-in-itself as that which is not yet: this statement may help to bring out that in the ontology of the not-yet we are not dealing with the internal constitution of the field of experience but we are at a transcendental level – although I do not want to suggest that Bloch was a Kantian or that the distinction between noumenon and phenomenon can be transposed to this philosophy without qualification.⁸ The summum bonum is not the ground of process; it is its aim and hope – the whole of Bloch's philosophy moves in this distinction between ground and hope, or in other words between ground and sky. Whether in aesthetics, ethics, politics, metaphysics or anthropology, the relation between the utopian and the reality it conditions is not one of grounding or causing but of wanting – desire. To have established the ontological irreducibility of desire, to have shown its intrinsic relation to reason and to have freed it from the motive of the ground or origin as presence, which determines for example the platonic conception of desire as rooted in anamnesis and, dare we say it, *Vorhandenheit*, constitutes the originality of Bloch's philosophy and determines his peculiar relation to both the history of metaphysics and the critique of metaphysics, with both of which he shares partial overlaps, but to neither of which he can be reduced. It also determines his place in the history of Marxist-humanist thinking; as faith is the heart of the heart of man, so ontological desire (hope) is the heart of the heart of socialist humanism and its principle. The problematic reception of Bloch in Marxist philosophy of his time as well as in the 'bourgeois' philosophy of his time are a result of this orientation, which affirms an ontological structure that can easily be mistaken by Marxists for a return to metaphysics and by bourgeois thinkers for an exaggeration even of the already wild claims of Marxists about the deliverances of revolution. If we take a closer look we see that nothing is further from the

which has not been investigated in any great depth yet; I think it is here that we see the relevance of his work most clearly.

⁸ We begin to see what could be meant by the qualification 'speculative critique' which I introduced above. This interpretation may help us to understand how Bloch could link the words 'principle' and 'hope': only if we view the relation between principle and the principled as one of manifestation and not as one of causal or logical deduction is it clear what it can mean to say that hope can be a principle. Justice is the principle of the law in that the law articulates justice in the situations of human life, not in that the law is based on an independently available or articulated underlying foundation that acts as the principle to which all laws can be reduced. Principle has to be understood as 'archè': the remaining focus and middle around which the principled revolves. Bloch adds to the antique-christian understanding of archè the idea that the true genesis stands at the end, not at the beginning. That is what is meant when we say that we do not yet know what justice is, or, for that matter, what hope is. Things like justice and hope are the implicit counterparts to the discourses that explicate them and which they accompany – we are not far off from Derrida's notion of hauntology – a Spirit of Utopia going around.

truth and that we have to do, in fact, with a third way between metaphysics and post-metaphysical thinking.

If the utopian kernel in realisation is to be thought of as standing in positive relation to realisation – so as playing a role in how realisation turns out – it has to be in some sense a measure; desire may not be a cause, but it does put us in touch with a sense of failure or accomplishment. The truthfulness of utopia is the measure it provides for concrete action. But this cannot be the measure of a pre-given goal against which existing reality can be judged. No such goal exists. Bloch returns to the classical motif of the degrees of being and to the Hegelian analysis of the measure to trace the nature of measurement that is involved here.

Let us return to the ontological difference between the sphere of the not-yet and that which is. In the chapter on the degrees of being in the *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie* (13: 285-296) the contrast between being-not-yet and 'become being' (Gewordensein) emerges as a qualitative one. Utopian reality "ist nicht nur weniger oder mehr Wirklichkeit, im Vergleich mit den anderen Stufen, sie ist eine qualitative andere Art Wirklichkeit, durch ihre andere Qualität selber noch von verwandt scheinenden Realitätsgraden, wie etwa dem des Ideals, verschieden (...) es ist ein omnia ubique" (13: 293-4). Even potentiality or possibility is only the most familiar way of indicating that which lies like a horizon of the new around what has already become manifest. The traditional doctrines of the degrees of being assumed a parallel either between being and value, such that more being meant more value, or a parallel between non-being and value, such that the less something is, the more its value or worth is. As examples of the first idea Bloch mentions Plato, Thomas, Hegel and also Marx; as an example of the second idea we can think of Eckhardt and other mystics. Marx acknowledges that substructure, superstructure and ideologies can be more or less real according to circumstances, where 'real' means mostly 'efficacious'. Bloch stresses the alien nature of the idea of degrees of being for calculative-bourgeois thought and takes over the Marxist view. But in the case of the degree of being of the utopian, the qualitative difference of the utopian as compared to all quantities of being that have become goes well beyond the Marxist implicit equation of reality with efficacy. He appears to be hovering again when it comes to the question how this qualitatively different level of being is brought about: "Ja, das Noch-Nicht-Seiende der Latenz ist auch als künftiger Seins-Eintritt keineswegs garantiert, dieser Eintritt hängt vielmehr von allen Verwirklichungsfaktoren des Prozesses ab" (13: 294). But here we have to understand that the coming-about of latency has the character of desire: it strives to become real – or reality strives towards it. On page 296 we get a further indication of the nature of this bringing-about, when Bloch refers to it as "Hervortritt, Triumph, Sieg" – the gap between is and not-yet which opens up in the ontological attitude of hope is, and here I come back to the point made earlier regarding the necessity of an orientation on identity, intentional and oriented towards finality and arrival. Bloch likes to refer to experiences such as 'knowing something when you see it' or the dramatic anagnorisis as symbolic intentions of the realisation of the utopian. That dimension of teleological finality guarantees that the

process of bringing-about is, firstly, open and uncertain, without guarantees, secondly, not of an effective-causal nature and thirdly, nevertheless grounded in the historical practice of development, revolution and transcending – ‘überschreiten’ – that it is creativity. The transition from one state to the next through a dialectical relation between quantity and quality – so important for the concept of revolution – appears to be at work here. There are quantum limits that trigger qualitative changes, in nature and in society, as well as the other way around. We may think of the qualitatively different states of matter, which are triggered by quantifiable amounts of kinetic energy.⁹ But does this mean that we can assign a quantitative measure to qualitative transformation, even to the arrival of the utopian? Quantifiable extension, which is the basis of the external form of measure, is always a matter of more or less, without “ein veränderndes Werden und Umgestalten inhaltlicher Art” (15 : 152). For example, a simple numerical expression of kinetic energy levels in a material substance gives no indication of the differences between the states of matter. Such measuring as that which assigns a quantum to a quale to make it comparable across qualia remains external and is no measure, or even an adequate description, of the quale itself. But there is another notion of measure – one that is, properly speaking, incommensurably different from the external form of measure. This is a form of measure that takes its departure from the idea of degrees of being or of intensity and that is inherently dynamic or processual: “Es läßt sich ja Statik nur erledigen durch ein neues Messen, das nicht an einem vorgegebenen Maßstab, sondern an einem *werthaften* Maß mißt.” (15: 154; my emphasis) The difference between the two metrical operations is that the first uses an existing benchmark as a standard against which to compare, whereas the second, the value-based measurement, does not require a present standard of comparison, but an expression of levels of intensity (of whatever the thing that is to be measured consists). In the sphere of physical measurement we can think of the difference between, for example, measuring height and measuring loudness or saturation. An intensive measure is a measure by degree, it can never be an exact, quantified measure, but it is a measure nonetheless. Such a measure is specific to what it measures, it cannot be transposed to other areas, but is internal to its object, it is “lebendig-elastisch” (15: 152):

Solch parteiisches Messen scheut sich nicht davor, ein gegebenes Maß gerade als unwahr zu denunzieren, also sich vor allem historisch-dialektisch nach derjenigen Wahrheit zu richten, die sogar schon gemeint ist, wenn von einem wahren Freund die Rede ist oder auch von einem falschen Glanz, und sei er noch so faktisch. (15: 154)

The idea of a measure that is given with ontological truth (‘a true friend’) is certainly central to understanding how the utopian can be a measure and can therefore be used in the

⁹ I do not think Bloch anywhere discusses in detail the states of society, the personal dyad, the group, the class, the mob, the mass – but I think it would be in line with his thinking to develop such a categorisation, as others have done.

historical process of realisation, but it is not enough. We have already seen the centrality of transgression for an understanding of the not-yet, and its precisely this aspect of transgression or exodus that is not easily accounted for in the traditional theory of measure, which is based in idealism and in a static ontology. Bloch notes this problem with the classical conception of measure, at least as it has been handed down to us in Greek and medieval philosophy. For those modes of thought, the measure is essentially limited:

Und dennoch ist hier zu warnen, auch das qualitative Maßdenken hat von lang her seine Eierschalen. Griechisch etwa trat das qualitative Wertmaß auf als die *mèsotès*, ihr Maßhalten und Sichbescheiden richtet sich gegen alles Grenzüberschreiten. Die Warnung vor dem Übermaß kam schon antikisch herab bis zu der fast spießigen Mahnung des *mèden agan*, des Nichts allzusehr, also von allem ein wenig, mit fragwürdiger Besonnenheit des Verzichts. (15: 153)

It is as if an ontology of measure does not allow us to experience borderline or limit situations, in which the ontological fullness manifests itself. And yet it is precisely in these borderline situations that we witness the *that* becoming *what* – *daß* becoming *was*: recall that it was only in the front that ultimate identity is manifested as the truly new. The category of front is the ontological generalisation of the limit situation: the ontological ground structure of realisation requires the *Grenzsituation* – Bloch's word for it is *konkrete Utopie*. By interpreting the fullness of a value as its exodus form, its concrete not-yet, Bloch is able to rescue the metaphysics of the degrees of being, without having to also accept its sense of fixed order and static hierarchy, or – in its Hegelian form – its latent view of knowledge as *anamnesis*, as remembering what is already there, which makes the dialectical process of history into a necessary linkage of unfolding stages in which one leads to the next. For Bloch, on the contrary, at every point, intensity breaks out into the open, the new, the not yet – the world at its front is the ontologically highest point, this front is a limit, and we, who are at the front, are ourselves the crossing-over into the new – *Denken heisst Ueberschreiten*. This sentence now acquires a deep significance, Bloch's version of the identity of thinking and being which does not exist and is not present as an essence, but which nevertheless can be said to subsist. It is the point where he can link to Marx's statement that the goal of history is the naturalisation of man and the humanisation of nature, in which both will be changed to what they in truth are. This is the process in which existence becomes essence, the becoming of *Heimat* as an intensive, not an extensive, category and it is precisely this movement and realisation of moments that is commoditised in capitalism. In socialist practice, the measure of the ultimate becomes the soul of a concrete utopian practice and the measure of its critique of alienation, even if that socialist practice itself is by no means the reality of the ultimate yet. In this way, I think Bloch has tried to colonise the metaphysical empire and make it inhabitable for a concrete, historical and political humanist practice. Both that practice and the metaphysical theory need each other, at least in Bloch's synthesis, and help each other to their truth. In doing this, Bloch has succeeded in addressing and actively

inheriting most, if not all, of the problems and dimensions of existence classical metaphysics dealt with, while also addressing the purport and relevance of the critique of metaphysics, from Kant, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to Heidegger, and, of course, to Marx and Engels themselves.¹⁰

The 1918 edition of *Geist der Utopie* ends with a few lines that already, at the beginning of Bloch's development as a philosopher, express the central motives that I have tried to draw attention to here:

Denn wir sind mächtig; nur die Bösen bestehen durch ihren Gott, aber die Gerechten – da besteht Gott durch sie, und in ihre Hände ist die Heiligung des Names, ist Gottes Ernennung selber gegeben, der in uns rührt und treibt, geahntes Tor, dunkelste Frage, überschwengliches Innen, der kein Faktum ist, sondern ein Problem, in die Hände unserer gottbeschwörenden Philosophie und der Wahrheit als Gebet. (16: 445)

In this admittedly very expressionist, if not pathetic, language¹¹, we nevertheless see the reification of the utopian in the God of the 'wicked' and the resolution of the conception of God as the transcendent highest being into the dark inner striving, at the heart of process but yet external to it, and therefore giving rise to the process of realisation, which can therefore be called with an appropriate metaphor the 'naming of God'. The form of truth that provides the measure for this deepest existential dimension of the process of realisation, of human life, is truth as hopeful, intentioned anticipation – what we mean or meant by 'prayer'. That ontologically fundamental hope is not a guarantee, its anticipation not a passive, rosy expectation, rather it is a hope in the face of hopelessness, a creative attitude in the absence of a ground for hope. But that, we can see now, only helps further to release hope into its own utopia and arrival.¹²

Are these conceptual connections and these interpretations of the human condition still relevant for us? Can we use the intensive measure of the unity of critique and utopian consciousness to look again at our own attitudes, practices and presuppositions in (cultural) politics, environmental ethics, philosophical anthropology and indeed metaphysics? Can we

¹⁰ See my "Myth means: the saying word / The Lord said that he would dwell in thick darkness", in: L. Hemming, B. Costea, K. Amiridis (eds.), *The Movement of Nihilism: Heidegger's Thinking after Nietzsche*, London: Continuum 2010 (to appear) for a discussion of Heidegger's critique of metaphysics from the point of view of Bloch's ontology.

¹¹ Note that pathos is actually a prerequisite for ontological understanding. We know hope as an affect, and from there we can understand it as an ontological magnitude. Bloch reasons in a similar fashion to Schopenhauer in his use of the word 'will'.

¹² With these considerations in mind, it is not difficult to see why M. Riedel classifies Bloch's philosophy as a largely Nietzschean artists' metaphysics (see *Tradition und Utopie: Ernst Blochs Philosophie im Licht unserer geschichtlichen Denkerfahrung*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1994, pp. 268-288). I cannot agree with this because Bloch understands art on the basis of the utopian ontology, not the other way around. But a full discussion of Riedel's suggestion is necessary. I must, however, leave that for a future occasion here.

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approach Bloch at all without allowing him to approach us as well? What are the terms on which a contemporary dialogue with Bloch could become possible again, and why would that be desirable? These questions cannot be discussed here; what I have tried to do is to show the subtlety and consistency of his philosophy, which certainly had a role to play in capturing its own time in thought and to suggest that perhaps his time has not yet ended because at the deepest level it has not yet begun. All writing is utopian.